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EDITORIALS

Doctors and Lobbies

For many years the medical professional has held itself aloof from the crass business of lobbying legislative bodies. The very word "lobby" has set up a sordid picture in many medical minds and has caused doctors to shy away from the implication that a noble profession should stoop to any endeavor to influence legislation.

On the other hand, Mr. Webster and other lexicographers have long defined a lobby or the practice of lobbying in much more acceptable terms; the American people have long since recognized the practice of attempting to influence legislation as nothing more than the exercise of the privilege of petitioning the government which is specifically set forth in the Bill of Rights.

On August 16, 1949, a showdown on this subject was enacted in the U. S. Senate. It is a pleasure to report that the medical "lobby" won out.

Briefly, the President of the United States offered a plan of reorganization of certain executive departments of the government, in conformity with terms of a law passed by the Congress in 1946 and presumably in furtherance of one section of the Hoover Commission survey and recommendations. The President asked that the several governmental departments of health, education and social security be combined in a Department of Welfare, with its head a member of the Cabinet. (The Hoover Commission had recommended the establishment of a "United Medical Service organization as an independent administration reporting to the President, *instead of as a bureau of a department of health, education and security.*" [Italics by Ed.])

Despite the source of the presidential proposal, and despite the propagandistic appeals of the Committee for the Nation's Health and other well-wishers

that the President's program was following the Hoover Commission recommendations, it was obvious to some members of Congress that the plan was diametrically opposed to what Mr. Hoover and his unbiased commission of citizens had proposed.

The job of medicine, and the job which medicine undertook singlehanded, was to point out to the Senate how widely the President's proposal had missed the mark. In the eyes of the critics, that undertaking was a job of lobbying. (Of course, the propaganda *for* the President's proposal was not lobbying.)

When the chips were down, when the Senate roll was called, the vote was 60 to 32 against the President's proposal. The medical profession had been able to point out the fundamentals of the presidential scheme to that many Senators—and even to more, although some of them seemed to hold party considerations above other factors in the voting.

Thus ends one aspect of the President's reorganization program. And thus begins, it is to be hoped, the realization of some facts which have long been lurking around the corner, unrecognized by some. First, the authority of the President is not absolute but is subject to the will of the Congress, the elected representatives of the people. Second, that the truth can be made to prevail despite the high position of some who would distort it to their own ends.

Finally, the medical profession must by now have learned of its own strength and authority in the cause of truth and justice, when and if the profession decides to strap on its weapons and go out to do battle. This fight was won by the profession itself.

If this be lobbying, let us have more of it in the cause of sound scientific principles and in behalf of the people of our country.